

EVENTS OF 2011

The Mindat.org conference – Lwywek Śląski, Poland

In July 2011 close to 100 people from around the world came together to meet in the small Polish town of Lwywek Śląski for the very first Mindat.org international conference field trips.

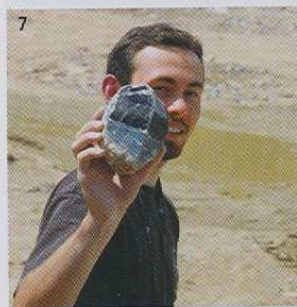
This event, organized by the mindat.org website (which I founded), and the Spirifer geological society from Poland (in particular, Tomasz Prazkier), along with a great deal of assistance from the town of Lwywek Śląski itself – coinciding with the town's annual 'Crystal Days' festival and rock/mineral/gem show.

The aim of the conference was to bring people together from all over the world to share their common interest in minerals with a mixture of technical and informative conference presentations, field trips to collect minerals and a great programme of social events. The idea for the conference came exactly one year earlier

when I was visiting the town with Tomasz during the Crystal Days festival of 2010. We both agreed that the festival and town were the ideal setting for a conference, and with the very generous help offered to us by the town, we started the preparations.

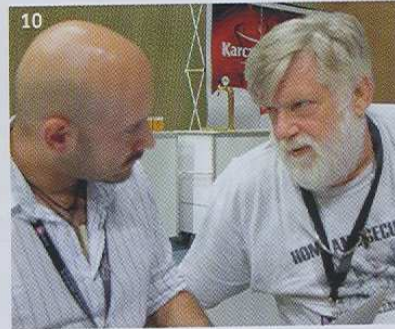
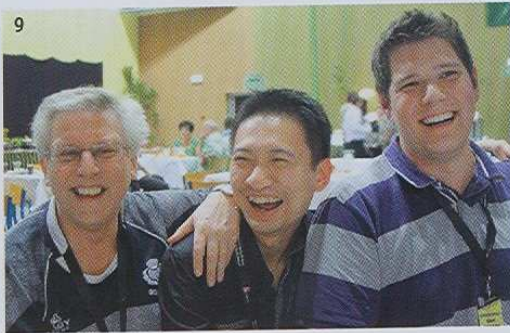
Lwywek Śląski is a small town in Lower Silesia in Poland. This area was, until 1945, part of Germany, with the historic German name of Löwenberg. Although much of the old center of the town was destroyed during the last days of the Second World War, it still contains many historic buildings, but the town is centered around the old town hall, which was the venue for two of our evening parties.

The event started on Sunday 10th July 2011 as people arrived from the airport to the town center for registration. The next three days – Monday to Wednesday – were the field trip days. The Lubin trip divided into three subgroups of 10 people each, who were given guided tours (with a little collecting allowed) in three different mines. Although the minerals found were not very exciting, I saw



1. The tower of the Town Hall in Lwywek Śląski.
2. Jolyon Ralph (left) and Brian Jackson (National Museums Scotland).
3. Tomasz Prazkier (Spirifer Minerals, Poland) – Main organizer of the conference.
4. Rainer and Doris Bode (Bode Verlag, Germany) represent their books and magazine.
5. Scott Werschky (Miner's Lunchbox Minerals).
6. Mineral show at the Mindat Conference.
7. Andrzej Korsekwa with a large smoky quartz crystal found at Strzegom.
8. Collectors at a Strzegom granite quarry.

Photo: Jolyon Ralph



9. Brian Jackson, Miro Ng, and Liam Schofield.

10. Mindat managers, Chris Mavris (Italy) and Rob Woodside (Canada).

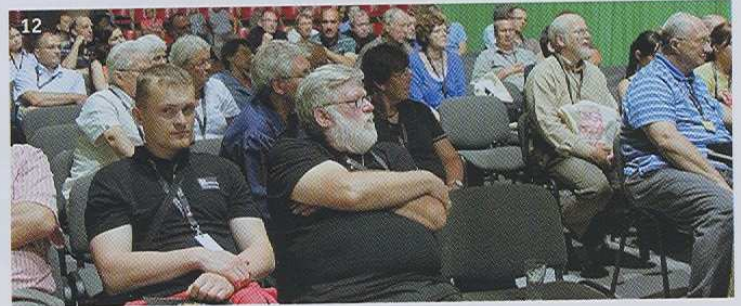
11. Scott Werschky giving a presentation.

12. Conference attendees listening to the talk.

13. The mayor of Lwówek Slaski (in center, wearing tie) with conference delegates.

14. Parade through the town center.

15. Katya Davydenko and Jolyon Ralph with local traditional singers.



some quite impressive large gypsum groups that had been given to a few members of the group by the guides, there were also some secondary copper minerals (possibly chalcantinite), and crystalline halite.

One of the main attractions of our field trips was the opportunity to collect at the famous Srtzegom (or Striegau – its old German name) granite quarries. Each day the groups visited two or three different quarries where they were able to collect a variety of minerals from the miarolitic cavities which can be quite frequent in certain quarries, including Stilbite, Chabazite, Fluorite, Smoky Quartz, Microcline, Epidote.

The other trips were to local agate localities – the region is famous for its agate fields, and to Sklary where chrysoprase, the green nickel-coloured variety of chalcedony, is found.

Every evening was followed by a party of some kind – the most spectacular being the open-air "field party" on the tuesday night, with seemingly endless barbeque food was being provided, and Tomasz was always on hand to offer vodka to people.

Thursday and Friday were our two main conference days, held in the town Gymnasium which had been specially converted for our use into a meeting hall. Presentations included 'Theories of Agate Formation', by Brian Jackson from National Museums of

Scotland, 'Native Gold from Round Mountain, USA', by Scott Werschky, a double-talk on classic Japanese mineralogical sites from Alfredo Petrov and a talk by Berthold Ottens on the zeolite and associated minerals from the spilite basalts of Mumbai, India. A mineral show running in the same hall allowed people to view and buy minerals during the gaps between presentations and during lunch time.

Friday was also the official opening of the town's own mineral show and festival, the Crystal Days celebration. It's not just a mineral and gem show; it's a celebration that the whole town takes part in, and attracts visitors from the whole region and beyond.

Saturday and Sunday were workshop days, along with some more technical presentations on saturday morning. But those who had enough of presentations were enjoying the atmosphere of the Crystal Days festival in the town center. But those who stayed learned a great deal about both mineral photography – with Jeff Scovil teaching some of the tricks of his many years experience in mineral photography – and a workshop from myself detailing some of the more advanced ways to contribute to the mindat.org database.

Finally, on Sunday evening, those who remained were treated to an incredible firework display in the town center to signal

the end of the Crystal Days festival. We all said our goodbyes and left for home.

As an organizer, I was very pleased with the way this event ran and the positive reactions we had from those who attended. Our second conference, in Midelt, Morocco (November 2012) is nearly sold out now, and many of those who attended the Poland conference have booked again for this new event, which will be even bigger and more ambitious than Poland (including up to 9 days collecting at famous Moroccan mineral sites).

One aspect I was very happy with was that we had a very high percentage of younger people attending our conference than I have seen at other events, and a high percentage of women. We also had quite a number of people who were brand new to mineral collecting (quite a few were gemologists who had seen the advertisement on mindat.org and decided it sounded a fun adventure). We had three visitors from Australia, we had seven participants from Hong Kong. We even had one who rode on bicycle from Italy to the conference!

The mindat.org conferences may not run every year in the future – they are very hard work to organize – but they have very quickly become an important fixture on people's calendars, and we will continue to find interesting new places to run them!

Jolyon Ralph, mindat.org